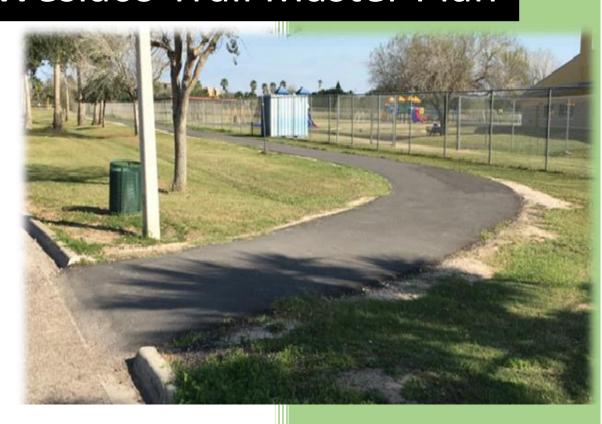
2017

Weslaco Trail Master Plan



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The following individuals are being recognized for their significant contributions to the preparation of the 2017 Weslaco Trails Master Plan.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Weslaco is at a turning point in its history. With more than 35,000 residents, it is the focal point of the Mid Rio Grande Valley with the potential of 150,000 people using the park facilities. The City is home to a campus of the South Texas College and a HEB distributorship center. The City lies along the Interstate 2 corridor between Harlingen and McAllen. Even with all the growth Weslaco faces challenges, such as improving mobility choices and promoting health and wellness.

Planning today is necessary to meet the community's needs of tomorrow. Hike and bike amenities are especially important part of this planning effort. The trails are critical if Weslaco wants to offer transportation choices, improved safety, enhance community health and wellness, and improve economic competitiveness. The City can overcome the traditional shortfalls related to hike and bike trails by developing an integrated safe, and convenient multi-modal transportation system.

Great trail systems are associated with great cities. Linking communities with trails and greenways is becoming a critical component of the urban fabric, particularly as the population becomes denser. Trails help to create sustainable and healthy communities through improved air quality, economic development, property values, and personal health, as well as enhanced recreational opportunities.

A tend toward pedestrian and bicycle-friendly communities is evident in real estate development throughout the United States. According to a poll by the National Homebuilders Association, 88% of the new homebuyers surveyed preferred to live in neighborhoods and communities that offer access to outdoor resources and safe places to walk and ride bicycles.

Weslaco has made a strong commitment to developing a Hike and Bike Master Plan:

- affordable personal mobility
- · carbon-free transportation, and
- healthy, active lifestyles for Weslaco residents.

The primary goal of this Master Plan is to create and integrated seamless transportation and recreation framework to facilitate hiking and biking as viable transportation alternative throughout Weslaco. The Plan defines an important connection between public health and the diminishing access to outdoor landscapes and provides action-oriented guidance for the development of an interconnected system of greenways, on-road bicycle amenities, sidewalks and trails.

2 INTRODUCTION

A. VISION

The Weslaco Hike and Bike Trails Master Plan makes recommendations for a community-wide network of multipurpose trails and pathways. The network is envisioned as a continuous set of developed trails, footpaths, bridges, and sidewalk segments that connect neighborhoods, parks, significant natural features and business districts. Routes are to be developed in consultation with neighborhood associations and businesses to provide the facilities that are safe and convenient for users and neighbors.

What does a Community-Wide Trail Network Mean?

- 1. Trails identified as a top community amenity in surveys.
- 2. Trails key asset to the community.
- 3. Positive contribution for public health and fitness.
- 4. Elements will include access, quality community growth, strengthening property values, and widening transportation options.
- 5. Quality of life as the community grows.

B. GOALS

A citywide trails network can improve quality of life for residents by giving them easier access to healthy outdoor recreation, linking people with destinations and favored natural attractions, and shaping community growth in positive ways. The Park Board, group, City officials, and staff developed goals for this plan.

C. PROCESS

The present plan covers only proposed trails. The City has had substantial public input regarding hike and bike trails in the development of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan completed in 2016.

The City developed a steering committee comprised of city staff, key stakeholders and active citizens. A meeting was held with the Park Board to inform them of the development of the Trails Master Plan.

Fall 2016 – Winter 2017 was dedicated to field research, the analysis of data, analysis of existing plans and an online survey for the community.

Spring 2017 the draft hike and bike network was developed based on fieldwork, input from the public and Steering Committee. A final plan was prepared and presented to the City Commission in May 2017.

3 CLASSIFICATION OF TRAILS

It is well documented that an active community is a healthy community. The declining health of America's population is alarming. Study after study affirms that sedentary lifestyles and prolonged periods of inactivity are major deterrents to healthy, leading to a rise in cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers. Land use and transportation are quickly becoming areas of focus as communities strive to become more walkable, bike able, and accessible. Weslaco has a high percentage of the community with diabetes and heart disease. Inclusion of trails and promoting walking will assist in reducing this alarming trend.

A. MAJOR LINEAR TRAILS

Typically connect multiple parks, greenbelts, schools, neighborhoods, employment centers, entertainment districts and transit centers. In addition to the obvious recreational benefit, major linear trails are essential in promoting alternative modes of transportation and improving air quality. The bike lane along 6th Street is an example of a major linear trail and can be used for individuals to get to school, church and shopping.



6th St. Bike lane

B. MAJOR LOOP TRAILS

Located wholly within metropolitan, regional and community parks, these trails provide multiple recreation and exercise opportunities while linking major amenities within the park. The trails in Harlon Block and City Park are examples of this type of trail. These trails provide exercise equipment and connectivity to other areas of the parks.



Harlon Block Trail and Exercise Station

C. MAJOR NATURE TRAILS

Trails are maintained natural surfaces located in a major greenbelt park. These trails provide opportunities for environmental education and contemplative seclusion in a natural setting. Often, markers or stations are placed throughout the trail to provide information or pictures of diverse plants, habitat, or wildlife nearby. Valley Nature Center and Frontera Audubon are excellent examples of nature trails.

Valley Nature Center, which hosts over 6,000 students a year, strives to connect children with nature in the hopes of increasing long term conservation. Frontera Audubon provides 15 acres of varied environments featuring activities such as Yoga on the Lawn and guided morning bird walks, among other educational opportunities.

D. NEIGHBORHOOD TRAILS

These trails are considered more of a neighborhood amenity rather than a regional attraction. Trails are typically located with community and neighborhood parks. A trail that is less than one mile in length is classified as a neighborhood trail. The trails at Harlon Block and City Park are great neighborhood parks. The new trail proposed at Rodriguez Park creates three park trails in different parts of the community allowing for easy access by residents.



Airport Park Trails

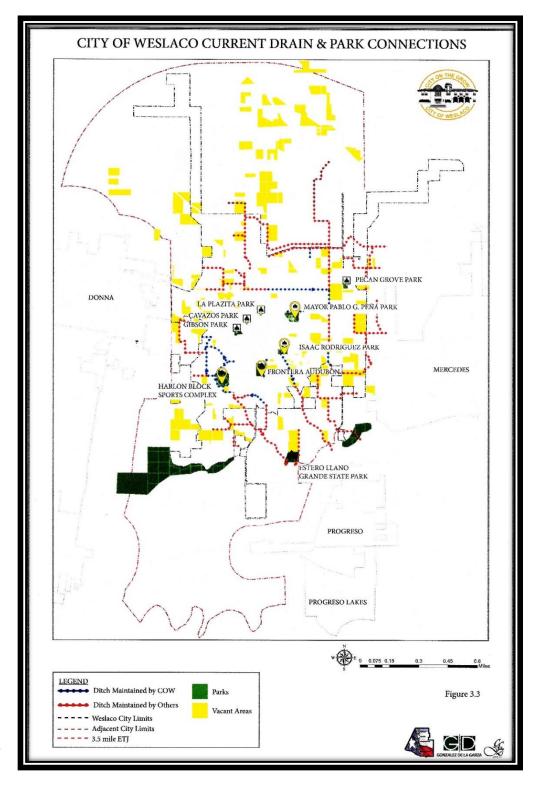
E. TRAIL RIGHT-OF-WAY

Trails can occupy a variety of right-of-way. Some are located wholly within the owned ROW however, this is not always possible with an extensive trail system. Acquiring ROW should be a positive process as trails contribute to the community quality of life.

Many existing and proposed trail corridors contain ROW that is utilized through a lease or license instrument. Utility and railroad corridors are the most common types of ROW that are not owned by the City. Developing working relationships with these groups is positive for the community. Weslaco has numerous drainage and irrigation canals where ROW could be used for trail development.

4 EXISTING TRAIL NETWORKS

Most of Weslaco's trails network lies south of Interstate 2, located in City parks (see map 1). Existing trails do not connect parks and natural areas. Developing trails to connect the city parks utilizing designations on the roadways began in 2016 and will continue.



4 EXISTING TRAIL NETWORKS (Continued)

1.1 Cavazos Park

Inner city .39-acre park with playground, park benches, and picnic areas.

1.2 City Park (Mayor G. Pena City Park)

Community park with athletic fields, picnic areas, and a one-mile trail. The trail could connect to a larger trail system into the neighborhoods to provide walking area for children. There are two schools adjacent to the park.

1.3 Gibson Park

Park is the home to the Valley Nature Center with trails throughout the area. Additional features include playground and picnic areas. The Valley Nature Center could be connected to the Frontera Audubon Center through a series of street trails.

1.4 Rodriquez Park

Located adjacent to the Knapp Medical Complex. The park is scheduled to be upgraded in 2017 to include a skatepark, trail systems. The park is connected to the first city street bicycle trail. The bicycle trail can be expanded to connect more parks and schools.

1.5 Plazita Park

A 1.8 acre park that provides neighborhood access for family events.

1.6 Harlon Block Sports Complex

Largest of the city's park with 88 acres serves as the sports complex for the City. There is an interior mile asphalt trail that connects to 18th street which is one of the connectors for the street bicycle trails. When the bicycle street trails are completed residents will be able to travel to Rodriguez Park allowing resident who work at the Knapp Medical Center an alternate for transportation.

1.7 Pecan Grove Park

The only park located north of Interstate 2 is owned by the neighborhood association but used by all residents. The park only has a playground.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

Due to the extensive nature of the trail network, it will be difficult to rely solely on one source of funding for implementation. The primary source of city funding is through a General Fund budget allocation or municipal program bonds. In addition to city funds, federal, state and local government grants become available through Texas Parks and Wildlife, National Recreation and Park Association, Texas Department of Transportation, Hidalgo County Municipal Planning Organization (MPO), and local foundations.

Grant programs typically have specific scoring criteria. To ensure the highest probability for acquiring grant funding, it will be important to suggest projects that would rank the highest based on the scoring criteria. Generally, trails that provide transportation enhancement benefits with long linear trails connecting schools, park, employment centers, and transit centers score better than a loop or nature trail.

Trail partnerships will become increasingly important to successfully implement the Weslaco Trail Plan. The City has already begun this process in developing the steering committee, working with the MPO and other cities. The ability to acquire private funding becomes more attainable when an active and organized advocacy groups exists.

The steering committee has recommended three priority projects that coincide with grant funding. These priorities are highlighted in recommendation 10.

Additional projects noted by the committee to be developed in the future as funding becomes available include:

- Complete the street bike trail from 6th street north along Airport connecting the IDEA Public School and then south along Bridge to the new police station.
- Trails along Business 83 from Donna to Mercedes.
- Trail along 1015, north to south.
- Complete the trails connecting all the drainage and irrigation canals within the community.
- Establish a partnership with neighboring cities for trail development to connect cities.
- Trail north and south on Bridge using street and canals. Connecting new northside park.
- As roads are either constructed and/or rebuilt, bike lanes should be incorporated into the plans.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The first five (5) of the ten (10) recommendations provided here directly address the five (5) goals outlined in section 2 of this plan; these two parts of the plan should be read together. As each route is finally developed, it will involve legal and contractual circumstances that are beyond the scope of this master plan, the proposed routes are indicated broadly, to identify which points can most usefully be connected and to show desirable routing for more refined investigation by City staff.

Recommendation 1: Create a comprehensive citywide trail and path network

A trail network designed to allow trails to connect all City-owned properties, dramatically improving the range of local destinations accessible on foot or by bike.

All segments of the trails network do not have to be equal. Continuously connected trails, fully developed hike/bike trails, sidewalks, low impact footpaths, and trails along canals should all be considered as potential trail segments.

Recommendation 2: Develop trails north of Interstate 2 to balance the existing south trail loops.

Trails developed north of Interstate 2 allow the City to work with the drainage and canal districts as well as the school district. There are large tracts that have not been developed to provide right-of-way access.

Recommendation 3: Add spur trails to serve city parks, underserved neighborhoods, and parks operated by other organizations.

City park properties needing trail connections are Harlon Block Sports Complex, Gibson Park, Rodriguez Park and City Park. The parks can serve as trail heads for individuals driving to the parks for exercise.

Subdivisions typically include some sections of roadway with sidewalks that can serve as connectors to trail segments. Spur trails should tie to such points.

Recommendation 4: Assess all rights-of-way in the city for their potential for future park development.

A railroad right-of-way running east and west through the city may offer significant trail development options, or at least options for an undeveloped footpath, and various other categories of easements also warrant investigation.

A special local characteristic created by land subdivisions is street right-of-ways deadending at canals. Some of these may have potential for trail development or spur trails.

Recommendation 5: Develop appropriate design standards for trail development and maintenance protocols for preservation and enhancement of

natural resources.

Trail design is an increasing specialized field, responding to issues of security, safe trail use, ease of maintenance, and noninterference with wildlife. Utilization of accepted design standards are needed to be used by park staff and developers for fully developed hike/bike trails.

Recommendation 6: Begin planning an ambitious follow-up phased trail development program.

Opening trail parameters to include planning for special custom trail segments can add a series of new dimensions to the city's network.

Options include:

- Lighted trail segments for use at night
- Consideration of potential for formal greenway designation
- Trail development for those utilizing wheel-chairs or the disabled
- Special trail offerings for youth, equestrians and off-road vehicles.

Recommendation 7: Focus on trails segments serving the most residents.

The suggested priority sequence for trail development is based on the objective of delivering easy trail access to the greatest number of residents in the shortest time frame. Trails should be developed connecting the high residential areas and then expand outward with spurs and connectors.

Recommendation 8: New and/or rebuilt streets

The steering committee looked at future trail development with the potential of bike lanes on existing and/or new roadways. The committee is recommending as the streets are improved, where feasible, bike lanes should be included. A Bike/Street Committee should be established to assist with the street designs.

Recommendation 9: Education for the community

Steering committee recommended using the city web to provide bike, safety, and educational materials to the community. These programs would include bike safety, roadway safety, etc. Residents are using the website so it is the perfect vehicle to educate the community about the new bicycle and trail program.

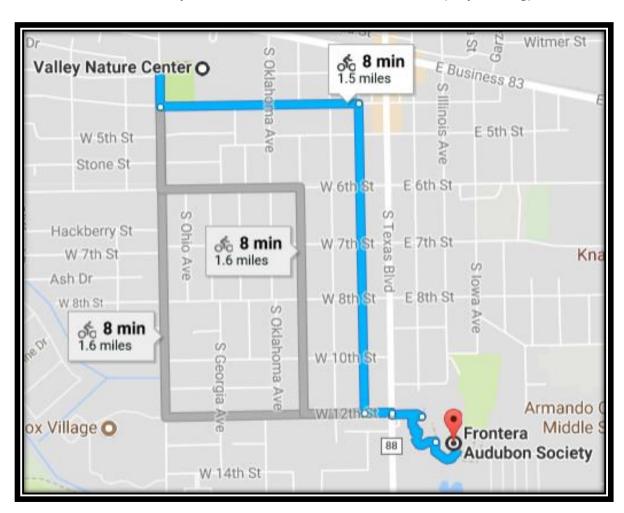
Recommendation 10: Priority for original trail development:

The steering committee looked at the potential for grant partnerships for trail development. Over the next year, 2017 to 2018, there are two grant funding opportunities with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas Department of Transportation. The projects noted would score high for those granting agencies.

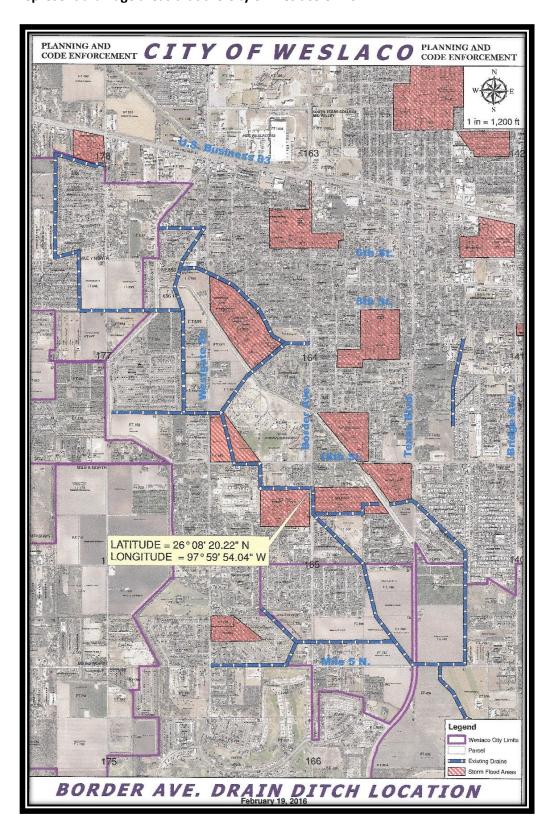
The City currently supports park development through the annual budget and could continue with the street bike designations to develop a trail between the Valley Nature Center and Frontera Audubon.

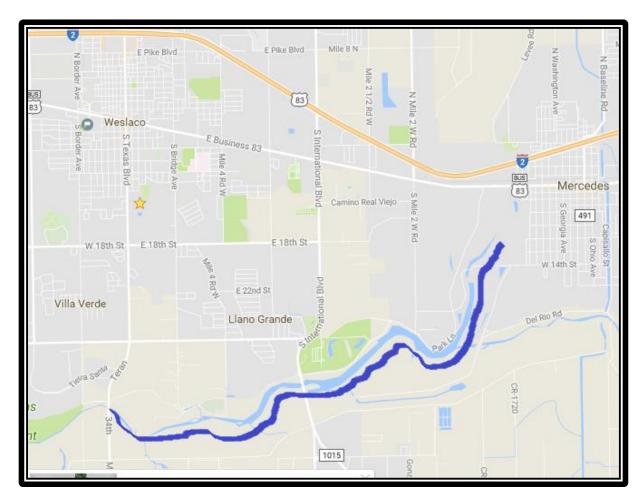
The following are priority projects to be completed first as determined by the steering committee.

a. Trail between Valley Nature Center and Frontera Audubon (City funding)



b. Trail tying the city owned drainage canals on the south of Interstate 2 to park site, schools, and neighborhoods. (TPWD funding, can be complete through phasing projects). Blue lines represent drainage areas that the City of Weslaco owns.





c. Trail along canal between Alamo and Mercedes (TX Dot funding)

The three projects are recommended as they correspond to grant programs available in 2017 and 2018. The diversity of the projects will meet the needs of a variety of community users. No specific layouts are identified through the master plan process. As each project is developed, the layout will be determined by the Engineering Department. Funding for the projects will be provided in part through the two grant opportunities.

The focus group listed these three projects as those impacting the greatest number of residents and providing diversified trails in the community. Weslaco, being in the middle of the Rio Grande Valley should serve as the example to other communities on trail development.

7 SUMMARY

Weslaco, the center of the Mid Rio Grande Valley, can serve as a focal point for trail development. Trails can be constructed inside the city limits to connect parks, schools, churches, and commercial businesses but trails connecting one city to another can also be proposed. There are two sites for city to city connectivity: along the canals south of the city, and along Business 83.

Interior city trails can use bike markings on the streets, sidewalk marking for trail continuation, 10 ft. wide sidewalks, asphalt trails and natural material trails. Trails do not have to have the same materials along the route. The trail materials used will depend on the existing surfacing.

Weslaco can apply grants that will provide funding for trail development. These grants should be applied for on a regular basis to allow for continuous trail development. Current trails at the parks are used continually. New trails allow for greater use by the residents while creating alternative transportation, reducing negative impacts from vehicles.

Appendix A: Some Trail Design Guidelines

These guidelines are based on accepted national standards for trail facilities. For more in-depth information and design development standards, a useful source is Charles A. Fink and Robert Searns, *Trails for the Twenty-first Century*.

<u>Pedestrian environment:</u> When an individual decides to walk their decision depends on the quality of experience. Pedestrian facilities should be designed to include the following: wide enough for 2 adults to walk side by side; protection from traffic; trees for shade; and quality landscaping. The Valley has become known for the varied number of birds, landscaping should include planting to attract birds.

<u>Soft surface materials:</u> Crumbled granite compliments with the natural environment and is preferred by runners and mountain bicyclist. Granite can be compacted to meet ADA requirements supporting bicycling and handicapped accessibility.

<u>Natural surface trails:</u> Trails or footpaths that make sure of dirt, rock, or soil may vary machined worked surfaces to those worn only by use. This type of trail is appropriate for environmental sensitive areas such as irrigation and drainage canals.

<u>Lighting</u>: Lighting is required if trails are to be used by participants in the evening. For the hot temperatures in the Valley early morning and evening are the only times participants can use the trails. Lighting should be determined on a case by case basis.

<u>Trash Containers</u>: Trash containers along all trails should be accessible to both trail users and maintenance personnel. Trash containers should be placed at each entranceway and bench seating area.

<u>Benches:</u> Seating along the trails allows users to rest. Benches should be located at primary and secondary entrances to the trail and at regular intervals, set back three (3) feet from the trail.

<u>Signage:</u> Signs should provide information about the trail such as identification of routes and mileage, directional and informative. Signage should be discussed with police and fire to provide markers they would need in an emergency. Regulatory and interpretive signs should be placed at major entry points, and warning signs may be needed for various hazards.

<u>Parking:</u> Adequate parking at trail heads is needed for those traveling to the trail site. Most of the trails in the Valley are developed so individuals can walk or bike to the location.

Roadway Intersections: Crossings should be logical and at existing locations. Signage notifying motorist that there is a pedestrian crossing should be visible from a distance.

Appendix B: Funding Opportunities

<u>Texas Parks and Wildlife Department:</u> Texas Parks and Wildlife Department administers several funding opportunities for parks and recreation facility development and trails. The grants have a match requirement of 20 to 50 percent depending on the category. A Master Plan is required for eligible grant sponsors and must be submitted 60 days prior to the grant cycle.

Grant Type	Award Limit
Outdoor Recreation	\$ 500,000
Small Community	\$ 75,000
Urban Outdoor Recreation	\$1,000,000
Indoor Recreation	\$1,000,000
CO-OP	\$ 50,000
Recreation Trail	\$ 200,000
Motorized Trail	\$ 400,000
Boating Access	\$ 500,000

TX Dot and Federal Transportation Funding: Federal funds allocated for transportation enhancements are administered by the Texas Department of Transportation. Projects must conform to federal safety and construction procurement guidelines, and the required local match is 20 percent. This grant process may not be done yearly as it depends on federal funding allocations.

Foundations: There are several foundations in the Valley that provide funding for parks and recreation opportunities. Each funder has different requirement and grant periods. Checking in with the local foundations to determine the support for the project is necessary prior to submitting an application. Funds from a foundation may be used as grant match.

Local Business: Major businesses in the Valley support parks and recreation endeavors by funding facilities may times requiring their name to be associated with the facility.

Appendix C: Trail Maintenance Guidelines

Success and safety depend on effective trail maintenance. This includes trail resurfacing, vegetation pruning, facility upkeep, sign replacement, mowing, and litter removal. A successful maintenance program also requires continuity and predictability. The guidelines that follow are drawn from Building a Legacy (2009).

Safety and Public Profile

- Good maintenance deters vandalism and littering.
- A high standard of maintenance is an effective advertisement promoting the trail as a local and regional recreational resource.
- Good maintenance helps preserve positive public relations with the adjacent land owners.
- Consistent maintenance makes enforcement of regulations on the trail more efficient.
- A proactive maintenance policy helps improve safety along the trail.
- Litter receptacles should be placed at access points such as trailheads.
- Illegal dumping should be controlled by vehicle barriers.

Surface and Longevity

- Routine maintenance prolongs the life of the trail.
- Checks for erosion along the trail should be made during the wet season and after flooding.
- Where drainage problems exist, drainage structures need to be kept clear of debris to maintain flow.
- Trail surfaces should be kept free of debris such as branches.

Vegetation

- Where understory trailside vegetation is natural, desirable, and part of the habitat required for wildlife, it should not be cleared.
- In areas of wildlife emphasis, mowing should be judicious to preserve sheltering vegetation.
- Trail segments vary in how much restraint of vegetation is needed: a wide-open feeling is desirable on some but not all trails.
- More enclosed conditions are appropriate in wooded settings.
- Vegetation control should be accomplished by mechanical means rather than herbicides.
- Bi-annual mowing along trails protects the trail investment; suggested times are fall and spring.
- Understory vegetation should be cut before reaching 36 inches.
- Vertical clearance of 8 feet should be maintained.
- Written policies are needed to educate users about the important of wildlife shelter.

Appendix D: WESLACO TRAIL SYSTEM SURVEY

A.	Do you currently use the trails in Weslaco?	Yes	No
	1. Trails in the Park?	Yes	No
	2. Trails along the Streets?	Yes	No
	3. Canals	Yes	No
D	Do you think Wesless should develop Trails?	Voc	No
Б.	Do you think Weslaco should develop Trails? 1. Just in Parks?	Yes	No
		Yes	No
	2. North of the Expressway?3. Between Parks and Schools?	Yes	No
		Yes	No
	4. Along streets?5. Where else	Yes	No
C.	Should trails have connections to other cities?	Yes	No
D.	What should trails be composed of?		
	1. Concrete	Yes	No
	2. Asphalt	Yes	No
	3. Decomposed Granite	Yes	No
	4. Dirt	Yes	No
E.	If Weslaco had a trail system would you use it?	Yes	No
	1. Would you use it for walking, jogging, etc?	Yes	No
	2. Would you use the trail for bicycling?	Yes	No
	3. Would you use it for ATV's?	Yes	No
	4. Would you use it for equestrian?	Yes	No
	5. Would you use it for mountain bikes?	Yes	No
F.	Who should pay for the trails development?		
	1. Taxpayers	Yes	No
	2. Grants	Yes	No
	3. Combine funding through the County	Yes	No

Appendix E: City Commission Agenda



A REGULAR MEETING OF THE WESLACO CITY COMMISSION TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2017

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the City Commission of the City of Weslaco, Texas will hold a Regular Meeting in the Legislative Chamber of City Hall, located at 255 South Kansas Avenue, on Tuesday, June 6, 2017 at 5:30 PM for the purpose of discussing the following items:

NOTE:

If during the course of the meeting, any discussion of any item on the agenda should be held in executive or closed session, the Weslaco City Commission will convene in such executive or closed session whether or not such item is posted as an executive session item at any time during the meeting when authorized by the provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act.

I. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u>

- A. Certification of Public Notice.
- B. Invocation.
- C. Pledge of Allegiance.
- D. Mayoral recognition.
- E. Roll Call.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Public Comments portion of the meeting promotes a fair and open process for the governance of the City. This portion of the meeting is not intended to be an extended discussion or a debate and is limited to three minutes for each presenter. Due to the Texas Open Meetings Act, the Mayor and City Commissioners do not reply; they listen. Matters under litigation are not to be addressed and comments regarding specific City employees and elected officials may be prohibited.

If you are discussing something not included on the agenda, the Commission cannot take any formal action until it is placed on an agenda and notice of the meeting is properly posted. Registration for Public Comments must be submitted to the City Secretary before the City Commission meeting is called to order. As the Mayor calls upon those who submitted a registration form with the City Secretary, please step to the podium and state your name and address before beginning your presentation.

III. CONSENT AGENDA

The following items are of a routine or administrative nature. The City Commission has been furnished with background and support material on each item, and/or it had been discussed at a previous meeting. All items will be acted upon by one vote without being discussed separately unless requested by one commission member, in which event the item or items will immediately be withdrawn for individual consideration in its normal sequence after the items not requiring separate discussion have been acted upon. The remaining items will be adopted by one vote. Possible action.

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- G. Approval of the request by the Boys and Girls Club of Weslaco Inc. to utilize the tennis courts and park pavilion #24 during the summer program at no cost. (Requested by Boys and Girls Club of Weslaco, Inc.) Attachment
- H. Approval of a renewal of an Interlocal Cooperation Agreement with Hidalgo County (Precinct 1) to assist each other in mutual projects and authorize the Mayor to execute any related documents. (Staffed by Public Works Department.) Attachment

IV. APPOINTMENTS

- A. Discussion and consideration to approve Resolutions 2017-45 and 2017-46 appointing two members to unexpired terms to the Weslaco Hotel Occupancy Tax Advisory Committee and authorize the Mayor to execute any related documents. Possible action. (There was no action on this item March 21, 2017; Staffed by Finance Department.) Attachment
- B. Discussion and consideration to accept the resignation of Jim Chapman and approve Resolution 2017-43 appointing one member to that unexpired term on the Weslaco 100 Committee and authorize the Mayor to execute any related documents. Possible action. (Staffed by Museum.) Attachment
- C. Discussion and consideration to approve Resolution 2017-47 appointing one member to an expired term on the Planning and Zoning Commission and authorize the Mayor to execute any related documents. Possible action. (Staffed by Planning and Code Enforcement Department.) Attachment

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. Discussion and consideration to select a respondent to Request For Qualifications No. 2016-17-14 Architectural Engineering Design Services for a new Fire Station and Combined Police/Central Fire Station. Possible action. (This item was tabled May 16, 2017; Staffed by Finance Department.)

VI. <u>NEW BUSINESS</u>

A. Discussion and consideration to accept the Trails Master Plan for the City of Weslaco as presented and approve top three priorities in the plan. Possible action. (Staffed by Parks and Recreation Department.) Attachment

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